DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 537 RC 015 936

AUTHOR Priest, Simon; Martin, Peter
TITLE The Adventure Experience Paradigm.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adventure Education; Behavior Change; Behavior Patterns; *Competence; Coping; Definitions; *Evaluative Thinking; Experiential Learning; *Models; Outdoor Education; *Risk; Self Concept; *Time Factors (Learning)

ABSTRACT

A model to explain the adventure experience and to relate adventure experience to adventure education uses risk and competence as diagram axes with experimentation/exploration, adventure, peak adventure, misadventure, and disaster/devastation completing the framework. The model assumes that peak adventure, the point at which personal competence matches and balances with situational risk, is the goal sought by self-motivated individuals. The key to reaching peak adventure and to application of the model lies in the individual's perceptions of risk and of his/her own competence. The paper outlines and diagrams nine behaviors associated with correct and incorrect perceptions and relates the behaviors to the proposed model. The model illustrates the way in which adventure education can offer facilitated adventure experiences to enhance self-concept and social interactions by moving participants toward becoming astute perceivers of individual competence and situational risk. A third axis, time, demonstrates the dynamic aspects of the model. An example of a facilitated adventure experience is described and modeled. The paper is illustrated by 10 diagrams. (LFL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED276537

THE ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE PARADIGM

By

Simon Priest
and
Peter Martin

1985

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Simon Priest

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

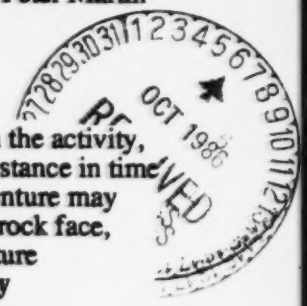
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RC015936

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



THE ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE

The experience of adventure depends on one's perception of the risk inherent in the activity, on one's perception of their own competence to meet or overcome that risk, and the instance in time when the experience occurs. From one day to another, a person's impression of adventure may change with state of mind. The person who derives adventure from climbing a steep rock face, may not achieve the same experience while kayaking in whitewater. Thus, the adventure experience is both **individually specific, situationally specific, and chronologically specific** and is a function of individual competence, situational risk and time.

One factor common to all self-determined adventure experiences is the need to seek **optimal arousal**. Since the human brain is continually active, people seek settings which produce a state of maximal stimulation for their minds. Ellis' optimal arousal theory of play behavior (1973) states that individuals achieve a maximum level of performance when they are engaged in an optimum level of arousal. To this end, people seek stress in environmental situations which stimulate and bring out the best of their abilities. If the stress of a given setting tends to make individuals underaroused (lethargic) or overaroused (nervous), then their performance will drop off accordingly.

Beyond the work of Ellis, Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Model (1975) graphically explained the delicate balance which exists between personal skills and environmental challenges. He considered the challenges of a setting to be opportunities for action, and the response of the individual in that setting to be action capabilities. Furthermore, he termed the state which occurs from a perfect match of action opportunity with action capability: a **Flow Experience**. Csikszentmihalyi was of the opinion that when the combination of skills and challenges balanced each other, then a Flow level of arousal resulted. Occassionally, when they were exactly matched at the extreme limits of capability, a peak experience was possible.

Of greater interest, however, were the two states bordering on either side of Flow. Csikszentmihalyi called these two states **Boredom and Anxiety**, and they may be considered congruent with Ellis' concept of underarousal and overarousal. Boredom results for the very capable individual provided with little or no challenge. The unskilled person faced with insurmountable challenge and opportunity quickly becomes anxious.

The work of these two researchers serves to lay the critical foundation for explaining why people engage in the so-called "high risk" adventure activities. More recent work by Mitchell (1983) lists several reasons why people are believed to engage in the "classic" adventure activity of climbing mountains. He cites the underlying tendancy of a search for the state of flow and optimal arousal as the motivating factor in adventure. The adventure experience involves **intrinsic rewards** and **freedom of choice**. People are motivated to adventure experiences because their lives are rationalized, controlled, packaged, and extrinsically rewarding. Their everyday existence lacks the benefits adventure provides. Mitchell continues to describe the adventurer as a person who **controls** their surroundings by using their capabilities and strategies to influence the outcome of their adventures. This personality is the antithesis of the one who **accepts** the outcome of a chance event such as a gambler. Adventurers are definitely not gamblers. They are controllers "escaping," if you will, from a society fraught with rationalized controls, and seeking the benefits of joy and pleasure, inherent in "controlling" the adventure experience for themselves.

Although some amount of adventure occurs in any activity, outdoor pursuits have long been viewed as the domain for gaining peak adventure experiences. The perils innate to natural surroundings serve as a vehicle for self-challenge in outdoor pursuits. Recent writings by Mortlock (1984) introduce four broad stages of involvement in such adventurous outdoor pursuits: "**play, adventure, frontier adventure, and misadventure**" (p. 23). The four stages exist on a continuum and an average individual may experience any combination of the four during active participation in any outdoor pursuit activity.

A MODEL FOR THE ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE

The authors liken Mortlock's four stages to the states described by Csikszentmihalyi and present a model which attempts to explain and apply the adventure experience. **The Adventure Experience Paradigm** is shown in Diagram 1.

Formed upon the graph of Csikszentmihalyi, the axes of this model are termed **risk and competence**. Risk is defined as the potential to lose something of value. In the case of a negative adventure experience, this loss may take the form of a physical, mental, or socio-emotional injury. Competence is the ability of individuals to deal effectively with the demands placed on them by the surrounding environment. In any adventure situation, this ability relates directly to skill, knowledge, attitude, behavior, and experience aimed at solving problems and avoiding the consequences of risk by overcoming the challenge.

An expansion of Mortlock's four stages to five conditions, completes the basic framework of this model. **Adventure** remains as described by Mortlock. Play has been renamed **Experimentation & Exploration** as this is more in tune with the individual who first tests abilities before applying them to adventure. **Misadventure** has been expanded to include the logical extension of this condition: **Disaster & Devastation**. Frontier adventure is replaced with **Peak Adventure**, which includes the state of flow and which may or may not involve peak experiences depending upon the individual's frame of mind and the level of risk and competence.

To properly understand this model, one must first consider the premise that self-motivated individuals will initially seek Peak Adventure as their goal condition. If approached correctly, this goal condition is the point at which personal competence matches and balances perfectly with situational risk. This desire is in line with Ellis' arousal seeking behavior, and Mitchell's explanation of Csikszentmihalyi's state of flow. The pleasure derived from the process of "living on the razor's edge," knowing full well that at any minute they could fall off into misadventure, but for the exercise of personal skill and judgement. This is the desired condition which motivates people to partake in adventure experiences (Meier, 1978; Miles, 1978).

To better understand the dynamics of this model, the reader's attention is drawn to the fact that there are three different types of risk and competence: real, actual and perceived.

First, there is the **real risk** (danger) inherent in the situation and the **real competence** (skill) of the individual. These represent the uppermost possible limits for each variable. From moment to moment, no one can tell with certainty where the **real** values of risk and competence will lie. At best, these values can only be estimated by the facilitators and the participants involved in the adventure experience.

Second, there is the **actual risk** of the situation and the **actual competence** of the individual. These represent the amount of real risk which actually occurs in a given setting and the amount of real competence which an individual can muster in that setting. **Actual** values arise from the interaction of individual and situation. Their value is ultimately a reflection of this interaction, and a manifestation of the real values for risk and competence. It is their combination, which dictates the condition of the adventure experience which results.

Third, there is the individual's **perception of the risk** (challenge) in the setting and the individual's **perception of their own competence** (ability). These represent the best evaluation of the real values and may not always be correct. The **perceived** values are based upon subjective assessments of the real risk and real competence. It is a person's perceptions, which influence their goal's in the condition sought from an adventure experience.

Given that real values may only be estimated, it is the perceived values which define the goal a person selects for an adventure experience. The resultant condition, as an **outcome**, is dictated by the actual values. If the perceived values are in tune with the actual values, then the resultant condition will be the one which was desired. If misperceptions occur, as is often the case, then although the individual sought one condition, another is likely to result.

THE MODEL APPLIED

The key to the application of this model lies in the perceptions of the individuals seeking peak adventure. Astute individuals who are fully aware of their competence and the situational risk, AND who are correct in their perceptions of the real values, are very likely to achieve a peak adventure. However, individuals may **underperceive or overperceive** their competence. Similarily, it is possible for them to **underperceive or overperceive** the situational risk.

The reader experienced in adventure facilitation will recognize the following pair of examples explaining the possible misperceptions. The examples describe two self-motivated individuals seeking peak adventure. One is considered to be **timid and fearful**; the other is **fearless and arrogant**. For Diagrams 2 and 3, the term 'Actual' represents the actual values which exist and 'Perceived' refers to the individual's misperception of the real values.

In Diagram 2, a timid and fearful participant, with a low perception of competence and a high perception of risk, enters an adventure experience with peak adventure as a desired goal. Recalling that adventure is individual and activity specific, the resultant experience is merely one of exploration and experimentation, because the actual competence and actual risk dictate the outcome. The individual has under-perceived personal competence and over-perceived the risk for this situation. Hence, the correct and actual conditions combine to provide an unexpected adventure experience.

In Diagram 3, a fearless and arrogant participant, with a high perception of competence and a low perception of risk, also enters an adventure experience with a peak adventure in mind. A misadventure results because actual conditions are such that the individual does not have the competence to deal with the risk at hand. The individual has over-perceived personal competence and under-perceived the risk for this situation. However, the correct and actual conditions are reversed this time, and they combine to result in unexpected misadventure.

These scenarios described above are common in the facilitation of adventure experiences. The authors have identified nine such **behavior descriptors** associated with various possible combinations of correct and incorrect perceptions. These are displayed in Diagram 4.

COMPETENCE

RISK / PERCEPTION MATRIX	**UNDER Perceived**	**CORRECTLY Perceived**	**OVER Perceived**
OVER Perceived	Timid and Fearful	Overawed	Carefree and Exaggerated
CORRECTLY Perceived	Insecure	Astute	Assured
UNDER Perceived	Naive and Innocent	Bold	Fearless and Arrogant

DIAGRAM 4: PERCEPTION MATRIX FOR THE ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE.

ADVENTURE EDUCATION AND THE ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE

Adventure education is one branch of outdoor education. It is an experiential process of learning about (the out-of-doors) Self and others. Its primary aim is to develop an understanding of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. The enhancement of self-concept and social interaction are paramount. A secondary aim is to consider the environmental relationships between human society and outdoor natural resources (Priest, 1986). Learning through adventure helps people learn more about themselves, others and their surrounding environments (Wood and Gillis, 1979, & Darst and Armstrong, 1980).

The underlying **premise** to adventure education is that CHANGE in groups or individuals comes from direct and purposeful exposure to: Challenge, High Adventure, and New Growth Experiences. The primary **purpose** of adventure education is to bring about these positive changes in the form of enhanced self-concept and social interaction. This is accomplished through a variety of adventurous activities including residential living, outdoor pursuits, individual ropes courses, and group initiative tasks. The ongoing **process** of adventure education involves the use of these activities to bring about these positive changes in groups or individuals. Within the framework such an activity, groups or individuals are provided with a task to accomplish. The task often involves problem solving and a challenge. The problem solving requires judgement, cooperation, communication, and trust. The challenge may take the form of mental, social or physical risk. To maximize safety, the risk is structured in a manner, where the challenge is perceived as being enormously high, while the actual danger is kept low. The final **product** of adventure education is personal growth. By responding to seemingly insurmountable tasks, the groups or individuals learn to overcome almost any self-imposed perceptions of their capability to succeed. They are able to turn limitations into abilities and as a result, they learn a great deal about themselves and how they relate to others. Participants experientially learn to become personally astute by gaining an accurate perception of their personal competence and the situational risk.

Given the procedures outlined above, the authors suggest that the matrix-related role of adventure education is to **move** participants toward becoming **astute** individuals: people who are correct in their perceptions of individual competence and situational risk. Since the condition of devastation and disaster has the potential to injure, and the condition of exploration and experimentation does little to achieve self-actualization, participants seeking peak adventure attempt to avoid these two extremes. The means for avoidance depends heavily upon their perception of personal competence and situational risk: the astuteness of the individual. If one misperceives one variable, then an undesired condition might result.

Recalling that competence is the potential to respond to and overcome risk, the **real** value is the uppermost possible limit of participants' responses. Once again, **actual** value is the amount of competence participants can muster for their responses, and **perceived** value is the participants' assessment of their best abilities to respond. If astuteness is the aim of adventure education, then the move toward astuteness may be achieved; first by bringing participants' perceptions more in line with their actual levels; and second by raising their actual levels to meet the real upper limits of their competence.

Both steps require experiential learning and a purposeful manipulation of the situational risk. Manipulation of the risk variables may lead to changes in the competence variables. By first raising perceived risk, while keeping actual risk low, a shift in **expected** conditions toward misadventure occurs. Participants expect trouble, but since actual values do not change the outcome is easily dealt with and they are surprised by their ability to respond successfully. Further such experiences result in an experientially learned astuteness of their actual competence. As actual competence improves then actual risk levels may also be raised to match competence levels accordingly and to maintain conditions of adventure, peak adventure and misadventure as primary learning conditions.

Adventure education enables these steps through a series of carefully facilitated adventure experiences. To demonstrate these concepts in operation, an example of the facilitated adventure experience (a primary vehicle for delivering adventure experiences) is descibed in the next section.

THE FACILITATED ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE

The **facilitated** adventure experience is founded on the belief that a qualified, competent and experienced facilitator will be able to assess the real values of risk and competence to a more accurate degree than will a novice adventurer. Each of the nine behavioral descriptors mentioned earlier are typically handled in a different manner by adventure facilitators. However, for the purpose of discussion, the timid individual will serve as a continuing example, because this type of participant is most commonly encountered in facilitated adventure experiences. The following scenario outlines one method a facilitator might follow in enabling the timid participant to grow toward astuteness. Diagrams 5 and 6 serve to represent this situation within the Adventure Experience Paradigm.

The facilitator, observing a self-motivated and timid participant involved in the activity of rock climbing, notes that the participant is not achieving a condition beyond exploration and experimentation when left to personal direction. Through verbal discussion, the facilitator learns that the participant is interested in reaching a condition of adventure. The facilitator concludes that the problem stems from misperceptions on the part of the participant. One solution chosen by the facilitator is to place the participant in a situation of increased risk.

This can be accomplished in two ways. The first involves selecting a setting where the real dangers are greater. The values of actual risk and perceived challenge will increase accordingly. The second involves choosing a setting where the real danger remains unchanged, but where the participants perception of the challenge will increase and consequentially the actual risk, formed from an interaction of values, will also increase. The facilitator judges the latter option to be more appropriate, and selects a steeper cliff with fewer holds, but with equally secure belay anchors. Although in no additional danger, the participant's perception of the challenge has grown in comparison with earlier climbing experiences.

Diagram 5 demonstrates how this situation looks within the model. The competence values have not changed, but the levels of risk have increased dramatically. The goal as set by the facilitator appears to be a possible misadventure to the participant, but the resultant condition is adventure. The higher level of challenge combined with the participant's usual perception of ability provides a different outcome which often proves to be a pleasant surprise!

Appropriately processed and debriefed, this adventure experience can lead to growth on the part of the participant. The outcome for the participant includes a greater comprehension of abilities and limitations. The participant's perceptions have grown closer to his actual competence, and with many more such experiences a similar comprehension for the real dangers inherent in rock climbing will be gained. Diagram 6 shows the values for the participant after the facilitated adventure experience. The participant has learned through direct and purposeful experience and moved a step closer to astuteness.

Through effective facilitation of adventure experiences, people can gain a greater comprehension of themselves, others, and the natural settings which provide the positive adventure experiences they actively pursue. Experiential learning in adventure experiences, comes from the involvement in unexpected conditions of adventure and misadvenure. As a result of experience, each individual moves closer to an astute perception of individual competence and situational risk and closer to the realization of peak adventure conditions.

TIME: THE THIRD AXIS

Consider a third axis for the graph of the model: one which represents the passage of time and is expressed in the third dimension (perpendicular to the page you are reading from). Each of the diagrams shown in this article are only snapshots taken within an instance in time. Imagine several snapshots stacked orderly on top of one another, and you have the adventure experience: specific to individual (competence), situation (risk), and now time!

The variable of time becomes important in the model when there are **changes** in either of the risk or competence values and **shifts** in the conditions experienced by the participant. For example, a kayaker is happily playing in some rapids downstream from a flood control dam. This scenario is shown in the series of Diagrams 7 to 10.

At **Time 1** the rapids present little real danger, little perceived challenge and little actual risk. Similarily, the kayaker has excellent real skills, perception of ability is equally high and in tune with actual competence. For all purposes the kayaker is an astute individual and in a condition of exploration and experimentation.

At **Time 2** the dam opens and releases additional water into the stream where the kayaker is playing. Real danger increases dramatically, and actual risk follows suit. The kayaker, however, is unaware of the danger, so perceptions remain unchanged. Depending upon the amount of change in the values of the risk variable, the kayaker is about to enter the condition of misadventure.

At **Time 3**, and once the danger is recognized, the kayaker's perception of the challenge changes accordingly. Faced with an enormous new challenge, perceptions of ability also change. Depending upon previous experiences with such whitewater situations, the kayaker's perception of ability may go up or down. Real skill will not change, but the actual competence the kayaker is able to muster will depend heavily upon personal perceptions and whether a mental state of over- or under-arousal is created by the onslought of water.

At **Time 4** optimal arousal might provide the kayaker with a maximal performance. If the stress encountered is pleasant **eustress**, then the kayaker may be able to show a positive change in competence and return to a condition of adventure escaping injury. If the stress encountered is unpleasant **distress**, then a negative change in competence will most certainly occur, thus giving up all hope of the kayaker avoiding possible disaster and devastation.

In Diagram 7, the baseline of exploration and experimentation is established. Diagram 8 shows the effect a sudden change in risk (ΔR) might have on the situation. Depending on the amount of risk change, the condition can shift through adventure up to and including devastation and disaster. In Diagram 9, the condition of misadventure is imminent: the kayaker perceives the potential that a negative adventure experience is about to occur. Diagram 10, shows the effect a sudden change in competence (ΔC) might have on the situation. Depending on the amount and **direction** of the competence change, the kayaker will be able to recover to the far side of peak adventure, or slip deeper toward certain death.

The addition of a time axis demonstrates the dynamic aspect of this model. Since adventure is an experience constantly in flux, with values of risk and competence changing from moment to moment, it is critical to be able to explain and discuss the events which take place. A model which failed to take into account the dynamic aspect of adventure experiences would certainly have limited application.

REFERENCES

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). Beyond Boredom and Anxiety. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Darst, P. W. and Armstrong, G. P. (1980). Outdoor Adventure Activities for School and Recreation Programs. Minneapolis, MN: Burgess.

Ellis, M. (1973). Why People Play. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Meier, J. F. (1978). "Is the risk worth taking?" Leisure Today insert in the Journal of Physical Education and Recreation. 49, 4.

Miles, J. C. (1978). "The value of high adventure activities." Leisure Today insert in the Journal of Physical Education and Recreation. 49, 4.

Mitchell, R. G. Jr. (1983). Mountain Experience: the psychology and sociology of adventure. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Mortlock, C. (1984). The Adventure Alternative. Cumbria, UK: Cicerone.

Wood, D. E. and Gillis J. C. (1979). Adventure Education. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

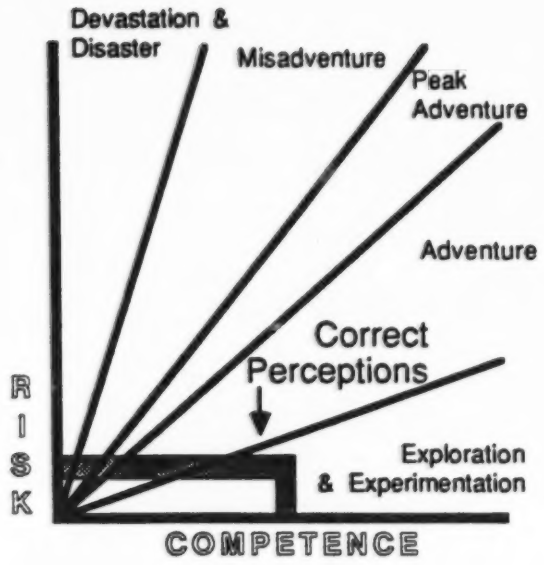


DIAGRAM 7: Time 1 - Playing in a condition of exploration and experimentation

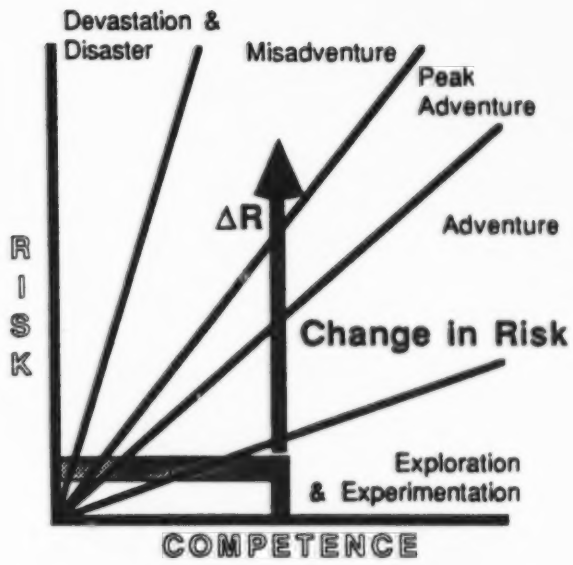


DIAGRAM 8: Time 2 - Increase in Risk results in shift toward Misadventure

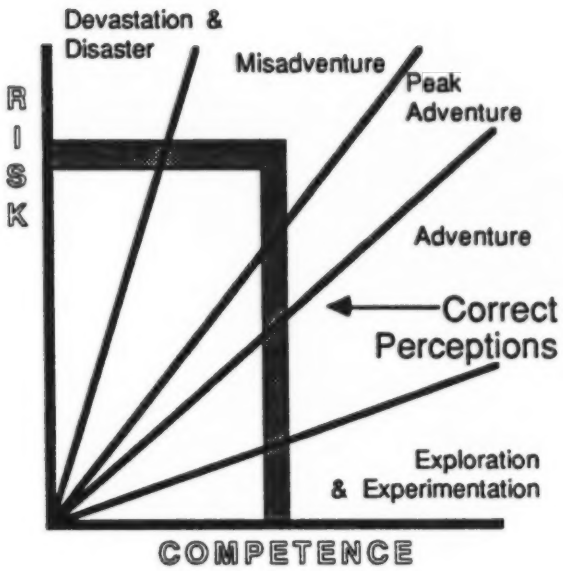


DIAGRAM 9: Time 3 - Correct Perceptions establish a condition of Misadventure

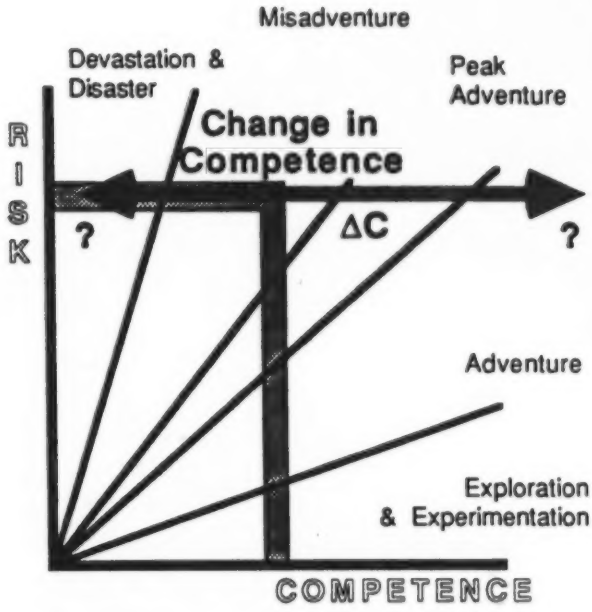


DIAGRAM 10: Time 4 - Change in Competence (direction unknown)

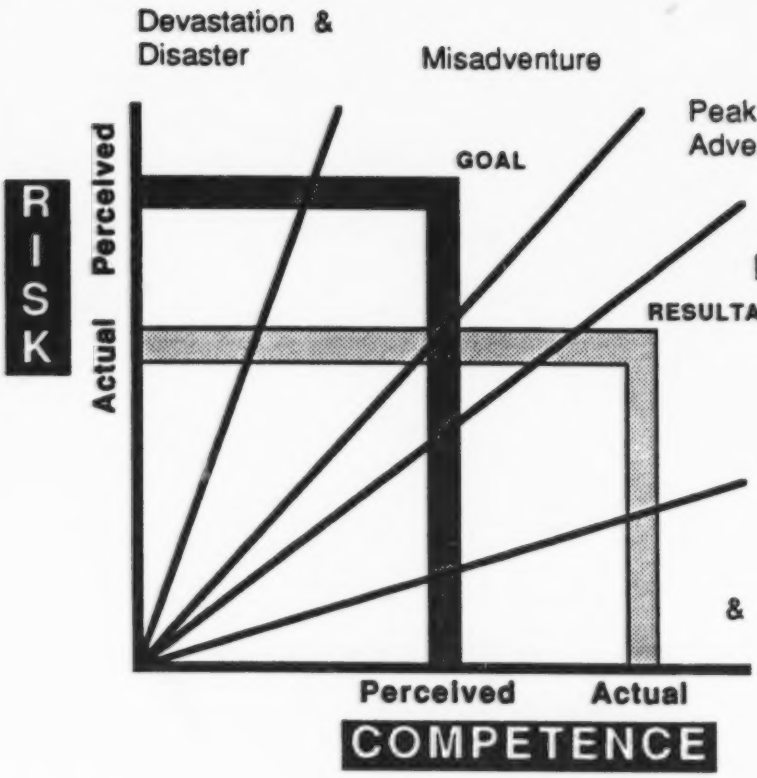


DIAGRAM 5: Before facilitated adventure experience - the timid profile

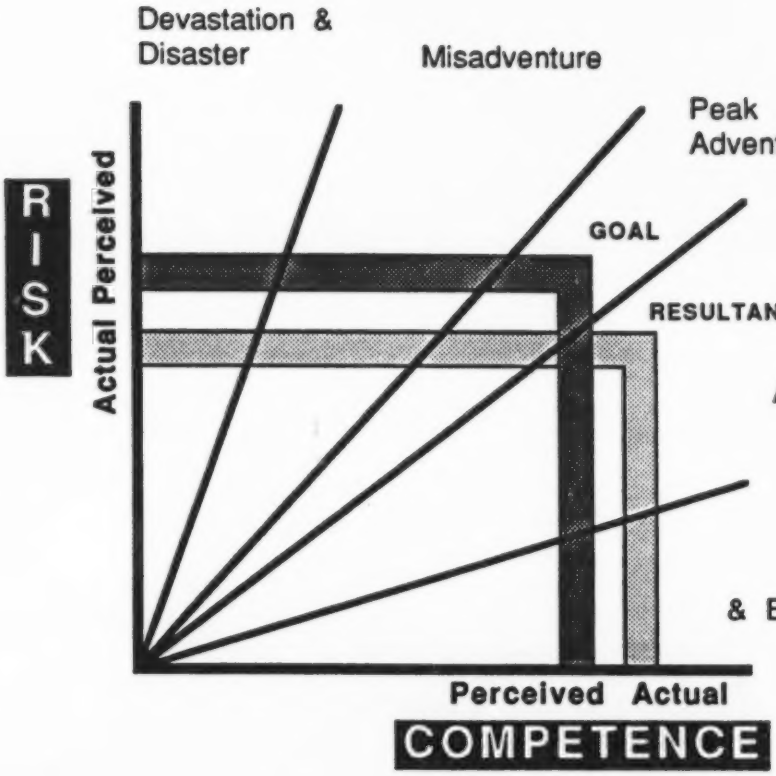
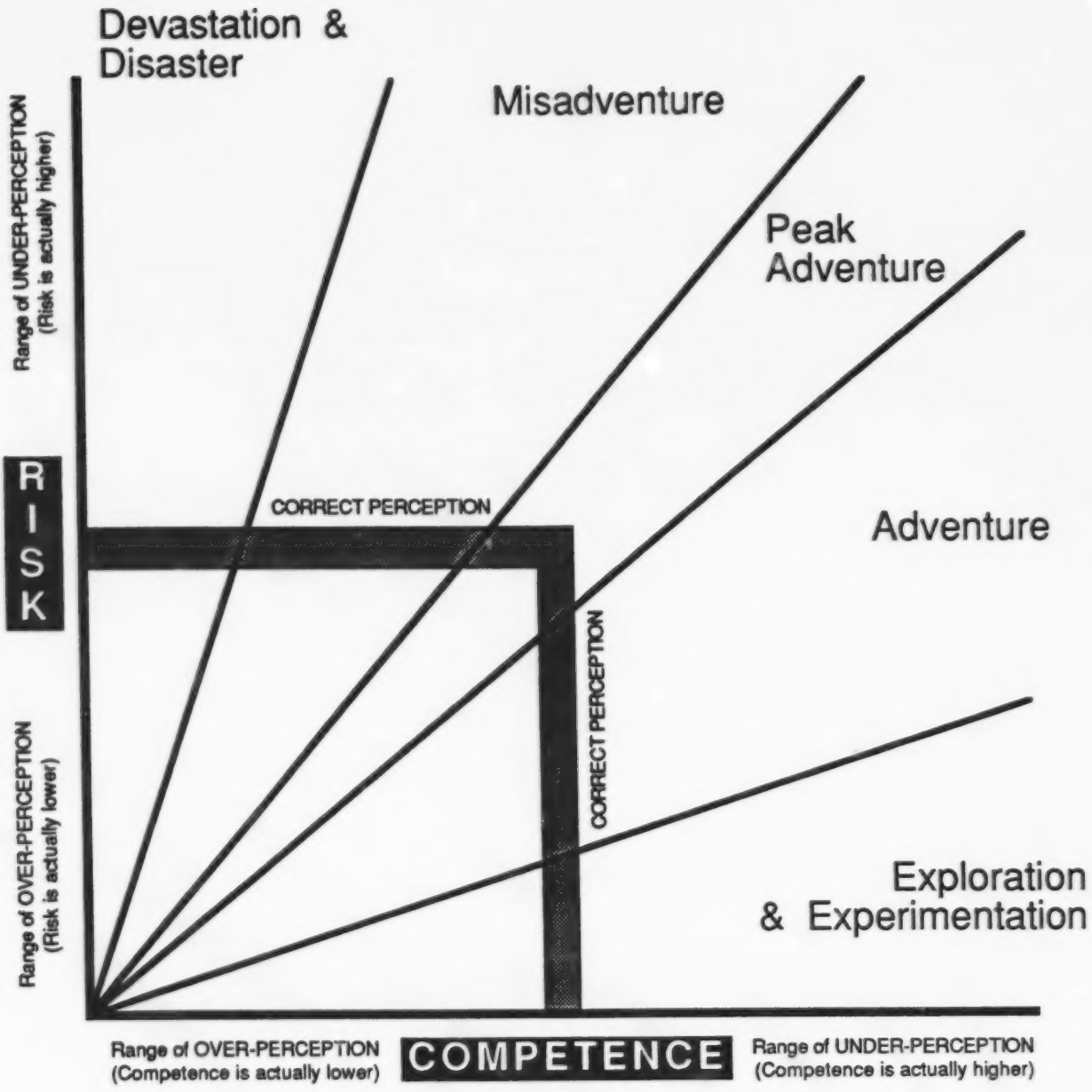


DIAGRAM 6: After facilitated adventure experience - the timid profile



THE ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE PARADIGM

Simon Priest and Peter Martin

© 1985

DIAGRAM 1: The Adventure Experience Paradigm

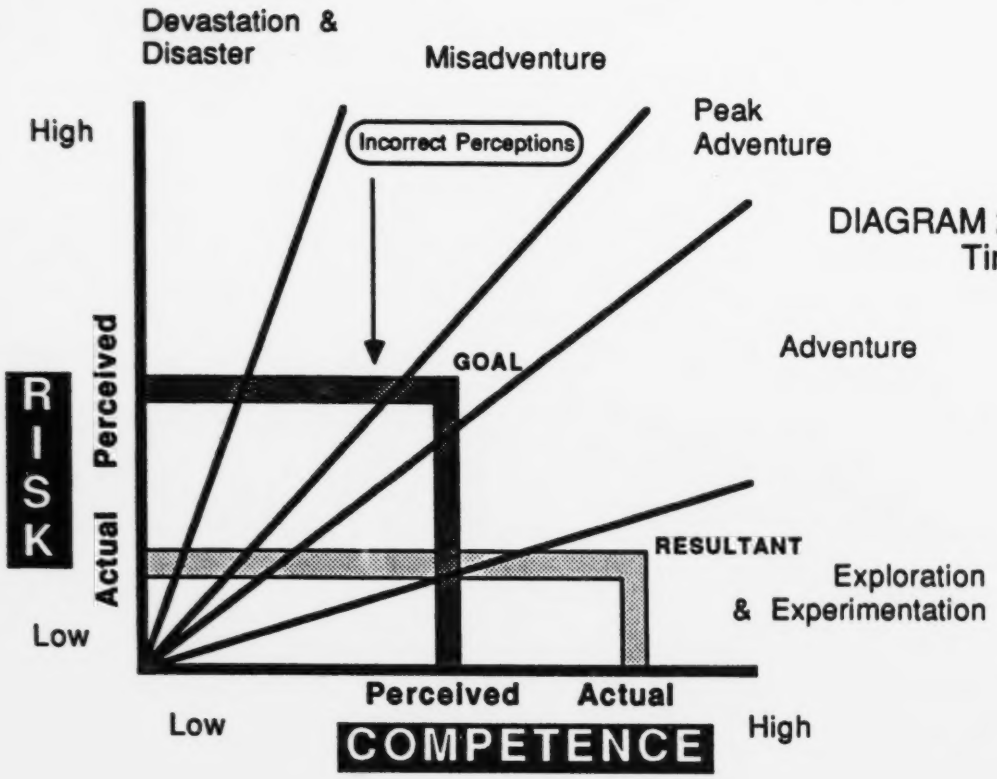


DIAGRAM 2: Profile of the Timid and Fearful Individual

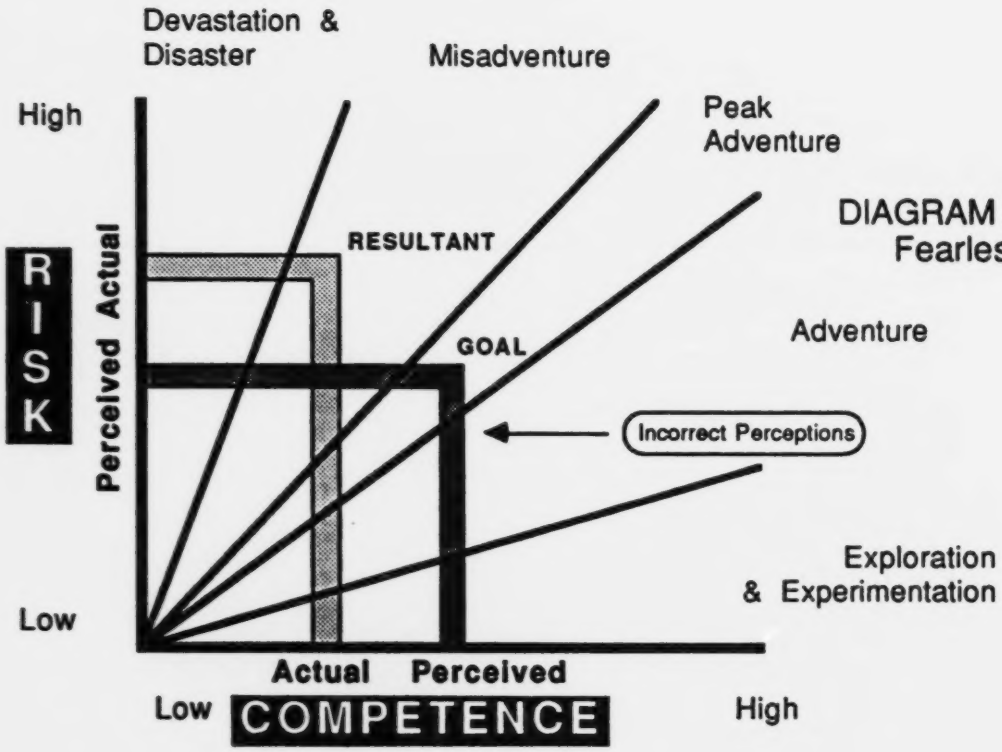


DIAGRAM 3: Profile of the Fearless and Arrogant Individual